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ABSTRACT

Research studies have consistently indicated that participation in school activities benefits both students and schools. Since the school reform movement began in 1983, the importance of school activities and student time commitment to such programs are increasingly being scrutinized. This paper summarizes a study to determine: (1) the current state of student activities in the secondary schools; (2) the educational reform movement's effect on such activities; (3) problems presently affecting these programs; and (4) future directions. A questionnaire mailed to randomly selected high school principals in the United States requested responses from either the principal or the director of student activities. There was a 39 percent usable response rate. The schools with responding administrators were representative of all types of schools and of all geographical areas. Results show that student activities continue to play an important role in secondary school programs. Schools offer from 10 to 50 activities, depending on size. Participation usually requires a 2.0 grade point average. Major problems included financing, student apathy, sponsor availability, and lost academic time. The reform movement's impact on activities was minimal. Future participation will probably decrease due to academic demands, the importance of jobs for students, financing difficulties, and increased demands on teachers. (5 references) (MLH)

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Student Activities Programs: Their Status and the Impact of the Reform Movement

by

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Introduction

Student activities in the U.S. are a major part of the secondary school experience. These activities are very diverse when one considers the range of activities offered: athletics, student government, publications, fine arts, school spirit organizations, subject area clubs, vocational clubs, and service organizations. Students involved in these spend many hours in their participation and leadership; teachers sponsoring or directing the activities contribute a large percentage of their total effort in preparing for and coordinating the activities of the clubs or organizations and the students involved.

Research studies have consistently indicated that participation in student activities is very beneficial to both the student as an individual and for the school as an institution. Data have shown that success in college achievement can be more accurately predicted from levels of individual achievement in activities such as debate, speech, drama and journalism than it can from grades in high school, college, ACT or SAT scores or class rank (Biernat and Klesse, 1989: 3). The military academies, perhaps one of the most sought after and competitive alternatives for higher education in the U.S., having realized this fact, weight a candidate's co-curricular and outside participation, approximately one-third of the factors considered in competition for appointments.

Since the initial wave of the school reform movement which began in 1983 with *A Nation at Risk*, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, student activity programs have come under scrutiny of a variety of policy and legislative groups. The importance of the activities and the time commitment of the students to these programs have been questioned; in some cases there have been major policy changes which have had the goal to limit the time a student can spend on these activities and to limit the impact of the programs on the school's instructional time. The result in many states was a "no pass, no play" rule which in effect suspended the student's eligibility to participate in any type of extra curricular activity if he or she was failing any subject. After seven years since the educational reform movement began, the topic remains a sensitive one as evidenced by importance of the issue in the 1990 Texas gubernatorial race.

In an age of educational reform, the question again is raised concerning the appropriate place of student activities in the educational institution. Has the reform movement affected the student activities programs which have played an important educational role in the past? Where are these activities headed in the future?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to:

1. Determine the current state of student activities in the secondary schools.
2. Determine the effect of the educational reform movement on student activities.
3. Determine what problems are presently impacting student activities programs.
4. Project where student activity directors think student activities programs are headed in the next few years.

Research Procedures

The research design for this study was descriptive in nature. The survey method of research was utilized to collect the data. A group of graduate students enrolled at East Texas State University in educational administration developed the questionnaire after reviewing the literature and recent studies concerning student activity programs. The tentative questionnaire was tested using principals and student activity directors to determine its validity and clarity. Suggestions from these trials were incorporated in the final version of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was mailed to 500 high school principals selected at random from across the United States. The sample was distributed on a state-by-state basis according to the percentage of population living in each state. An introductory letter headed by the Center for Policy and Research in Elementary and Secondary Education covered the questionnaire. The letter assured confidentiality and requested that the principal or director of student activities respond. The questionnaire was packaged in booklet form with the questions being easily answered in the booklet. After completion, the respondent closed the booklet with the stamped, return address label showing and dropped it in the mail. The questionnaires were mailed in late April, 1989, and the responses returned over the next two months.

The data were complied on a micro computer which utilized the ABsurv statistical package developed by Anderson-Bell for processing.

One hundred-ninety four useable responses were received. This was a 39 percent return from the selected sample. The responding administrator to the questionnaire was in most cases the school's principal as this was the individual to whom the questionnaire was addressed by name. In some cases it was referred to another individual for completion (see page 3).

Sketch of the Responding Schools

The schools whose administrator responded to the questionnaire were representative of all types of schools found. Table 1 depicts the size and general setting of each of the schools.

Population Setting

As depicted in Table 1, approximately one-third of the respondents were from rural setting schools, 12 percent from urban areas (not linked to a metropolitan area), 43 percent from suburban areas, and approximately 10 percent from central city setting schools. The school sizes ranged from less than 300 students to greater than 1,600 in average daily attendance. The respondents were fairly evenly distributed among all of the sizes of schools except those less than 300 ADA, which only represented 2 percent of the respondents.

Geographical Setting

The responding schools were representative of all parts of the U.S. The geographical classification utilized was that used by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Responding schools were well distributed in the nine areas as follows:

New England	4.2%
Middle Atlantic	13.8%
East North Central	20.6%
West North Central	11.1%
South Atlantic	10.6%
East South Central	4.8%
West South Central	12.7%
Mountain	7.9%
Pacific	14.3%

Roles of Respondents

The respondents were asked their specific role within the school. The questionnaire was addressed to the principal of the school, but it was anticipated that often times it would be referred to another person who was directly involved in administering the activities program. Principals responded in 73.9 percent of the cases; assistant principals in 14.1 percent; activities director or coordinator in 7.6 percent; student council advisor in 1.6 percent; and an unnamed other in 2.2 percent of the cases.

Table 1

Size and Setting of Schools

	Rural	Urban	Suburban	Central City	Not Indicated	Total Data
Missing	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	5.6% 1	75.0% 3	2.1% 4
<300	3.1% 2	0.0% 0	2.4% 2	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	2.1% 4
301-600	26.2% 17	4.3% 1	14.3% 12	11.1% 2	0.0% 0	16.5% 32
601-900	36.9% 24	13.0% 3	19.0% 16	5.6% 1	0.0% 0	22.7% 44
901-1200	10.8% 7	26.1% 6	17.9% 15	11.1% 2	0.0% 0	15.5% 30
1201-1600	12.3% 8	39.1% 9	21.4% 18	11.1% 2	2.6% 1	19.6% 38
>1601	10.8% 7	17.4% 4	25.0% 21	55.6% 10	0.0% 0	21.6% 42
Total	33.5% 65	11.9% 23	43.3% 84	9.3% 18	2.1% 4	100% 194

The School's Activity Programs

The schools' activity programs were rather diverse in the number of activities and the types of activities offered. Most schools offered between 11 and 40 activities, with the largest category (> 1,600 ADA) usually offering more than 40 activities (see Table 2). A chi square value of 165.083 (df=36) indicated that there was a relationship between the size of school and the number of activities offered. Activities most likely available included student council, honor society, choir, band, or orchestra; athletics/interscholastic; drama/debate; and cheerleading. Each of these were available in more than 90 percent of the schools responding (see Table 3).

Participation of the student body ranged from less than 10 percent of the students to more than 75 percent. The greatest number of schools had from 31 percent of the student body participating to 75 percent. Thirty-five percent of the schools indicated between 50 and 75 percent of their students participated in one or more activities (see Table 4).

Table 2

Number of Activities by School Size

	No. of Activities					
Size	1-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	>50
<300	25.0%	50.0%	25.0%			
301-600	6.3%	50.0%	37.5%	6.3%		
601-900	0.0%	40.9%	43.2%	11.4%	0%	4.5%
901-1,200	3.3%	23.3%	13.3%	10.5%	16.7%	27.3%
1,200-1,600	15.8%	18.4%	10.5%	26.3%	26.3%	19.6%
>1,600	7.1%	21.4%	16.7%	11.9%	38.1%	21.6%
All Sizes (Rows)	2.1%	26.8%	27.3%	13.4%	10.3%	17.0%

Table 3

Types of Activities Offered

Activities	% of schools
Student Council	97.9
Honor Society	95.8
Language Club	89.5
Yearbook	88.0
Newspaper	88.0
Choir/Band/Orchestra	98.4
Vocational Clubs	81.7
Academic Clubs	80.1
Service Clubs	76.4
Intramural	50.3
Athletics/Interscholastic	98.4
Drama/Debate	91.1
Foreign Exchange	69.9
Drill Team	63.4
Cheerleading	98.4
Other Activities	39.8

Table 4

Participation Rates by School Size

	Participation Rates						
School Size	<10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-75%	>75%
<300	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	0.0%
301-600	3.1%	6.3%	3.1%	12.5%	12.5%	43.0%	18.8%
601-900	0%	4.5%	15.9%	18.2%	18.2%	29.5%	11.4%
901-1,200	0%	6.7%	6.7%	30.0%	10.0%	40.0%	3.3%
1,201-1,600	0%	2.6%	7.9%	18.4%	28.9%	36.8%	0.0%
>1,600	0.0%	14.3%	9.5%	21.4%	14.3%	31.0%	2.4%
All Sizes (Rows)	1.0%	6.7%	8.8%	19.1%	17.0%	35.6%	6.7%

Policies and Administration of Activity Programs

Participation Requirements

Over 86 percent of the schools indicated they did not have a system to limit participation by students in the number of activities; 13.2 percent of the schools indicated that they had a system to limit students from over participating.

The respondents were asked an open ended question concerning the grade requirement for participating in extra-curricular activities. A wide variety of responses were received with a 2.0 grade point average being the one most cited. The following list indicated the responses and the frequency reported:

2.0 GPA	39
passing 4 subjects	27
none except state regulations for athletic participation	26
passing all subjects-no failures	21
passing all required courses (4) or all 5 courses taken	19
1.5 GPA	15
may not fail 2 or more subjects for interscholastics	12
Seventy (70)	9
Only for athletics	4
Passing 4 subjects	3
C's except for 2 D's	2
Passing 20 hours of academic work	1
Grade 9-12	1

Minority/Special Population Participation

Responses to an open-ended question concerning what respondents' schools did to encourage minority or special population participation in activities noted several important items. Most often special need clubs (34) or Black Youth associations (5) were established; publicity encouraging participation was listed (23); and special scheduling of activities was noted (20). Specific recruitment efforts of these groups was indicated by twelve (12) which was also closely related to an effort by sponsors (5) or faculty commitment (7) and personal contact (17). Freshman orientation (7), assigning peer contact (7), and bulletin notices (5) all helped in making activity availability known. Multi-racial judges were used in one school for selection of participants when that was a requirement and one school indicated that transportation was provided to these targeted groups. Several schools indicated that all were encouraged equally (17), that it was a matter of personal choice (15) or nothing special was done (17). In eleven cases there were few or no minorities.

Philosophy and Objectives of Programs

Twenty-two percent of the responding schools indicated they did not have a statement of philosophy or objectives concerning the student activities program, while 77.8 percent indicated they had such a statement. Almost fifty-two percent (51.8) of the schools indicated that a goals/objectives statement was available for

each activity, while 48.2 percent responded that no such statement existed.

Direction and Coordination of the Program

A committee of students, parents, and/or teachers existed in 51.6 percent of the schools provided or helped to provide direction to the activities program; 48.4 percent of the schools indicated no such group existed in their situation.

In most cases (46.4%), it was the principal of the school who directed or coordinated directly the activities program. In about one quarter of the schools (26.6%), an activities director was appointed while the student council advisor filled this role in some cases (17.2%) (see Table 5).

Table 5

Director/Coordinator of Activities Program

Position of Responsibility	percent
Principal	46.4
Activities Director	26.6
Athletic Director	4.2
Student Council Advisor	17.2
Assistant Principal	2.6

Sponsors

Sponsors for activities were most often recruited or selected by faculty members volunteering (67.7%). The principal appointed sponsors was the second ranked method with 44.3 percent indicating this was utilized. Students impacted recruitment of sponsors in 19.8 percent of the cases, and 6.8 percent of respondents indicated another method was also significant.

A standardized method of remunerating sponsors existed in 94.2 percent of the responses with 5.8 percent responding that no such method existed. Sponsors and coaches were compensated most often with extra salary or fewer classes assigned (see Table 6).

Table 6

Remuneration of Coaches & Sponsors

Type of Compensation	Sponsors	Coaches
Extra Salary	75.0%	93.8%
Fewer Classes	14.6%	9.4%
Other	4.2%	1.0%

The greatest number of schools provided no arranged inservice training for sponsors while other schools indicated some type of training was available (see Table 7).

Table 7

Training for Sponsors

Type of Training	% of schools
None arranged	44.3%
National, state, or regional conference	41.1%
Conducted by school	22.9%
Other	6.3%

The percentage of faculty involvement as sponsors and coaches varied greatly in the responding schools. A chi square test on the size of the schools and the percentage of faculty participating indicated there was a relationship between these two factors ($X^2 = 149.838$, df=36) (see Table 8).

Table 8

Percentage of Faculty Participation
as Sponsors & Coaches

Faculty Participating	% of Schools
< 10%	8.3
11-20%	28.1
21-30%	21.9
31-40%	16.7
41-50%	10.9
51-75%	7.3
> 75%	6.8

Financial Support of Student Activities

The fiscal support of student activities has long been a difficult issue with which principals, superintendents, and school boards have had to grapple. When asked to indicate in what order various sources were important, appropriated funds (funds from taxes) were the most important source. Other most important sources were money raising activities and admissions charges. Table 9 indicates the importance as indicated by the respondents.

Table 9

Sources of Fiscal Support

Source	% schools rating #1	Weighted rank order
Appropriated funds	37.7	1
Money raising projects	27.2	2
Admission fees	21.5	3
In school sales	04.7	4
Booster Clubs	04.7	5
Dues	00.5	6

Appropriated money was made available in the school's budget for a variety of activities; however, athletic programs received appropriated funds in 90.6 percent of the responding schools. Table 10 indicates the percentage of schools which used appropriated funds for specified activities.

Table 10

Appropriated Funds Allocated to Activities

Activities	% of schools
Fine Arts	76.0%
Athletics	90.6%
Intramurals	37.5%
Yearbooks	69.8%
Newspaper	72.4%
Drill Team	42.7%
Cheerleaders	70.8%
Others	20.8%

Booster Clubs helped to support numerous activities, but athletics and music groups as band, choir, and orchestra had a much higher percentage of schools utilizing this method more than any others (see Table 11).

Table 11

Booster Club Support of Activities

Activities	% of school
Athletics	86.6%
Music Groups	80.6%
Cheerleaders	29.3%
Drill Team	24.6%
Drama	15.7%
Others	10.5%

Evaluation of Activity Programs

Only 30.7 percent of the responding schools indicated that a formal evaluation process for the student activities program was conducted. Of those schools which did a formal evaluation, most did the evaluation on an annual basis.

Respondents were asked in an open-ended question what major criteria were used to evaluate student activities. A variety of answers were listed; however, the one most listed was the amount of activity or participation with the success of the activity being the second most listed. The following list or responses and frequency made up the answers:

Amount of activity or participation	29
Success or accomplishments of activity	25
Percent of participation	14
Activities schedule	10
Desired outcomes achieved	10
Value to the school	9
Community participation	7
Meet student needs	7
Yearly overview of activities	7
Student/Parent communications	4
Budgetary limits	4
Subjective judgement	4
Regular meetings	1
North Central Assoc (regional accreditation)	1

Problems of Activity Programs

The respondents were asked to identify the three most important problems their school encountered in the student activities program and rank them in the order of significance. These responses were categorized and weighted (by significance indicated) to determine the problems that were the most impacting programs across the country. The four problems most indicated were:

1. Financing the programs without funding sources
2. Student lack of interest or apathy
3. Difficulty in securing sponsors
4. Lost academic time for students

A similar study reported in 1983 (Vornberg, et.al.) in the south central U.S. indicated four related areas (in rank order) as being the major ones: participation of non-involved students; sponsors; time allocation for meetings and activities; and budget limitations. Although the three problem areas were identified as the same (or closely related), the importance was not in the same order. Clearly today the financing of activities was the most important identified (see Table 12 for the ranked list of problems and weighting).

Other problems identified by two or fewer schools included over participation of students, community apathy, non-school sponsors, communications, and out-of-school trips.

Impact of the Educational Reform Movement on Student Activities

The respondents were asked to indicate to what extent the national educational reform movement had impacted the student activities program in specified areas. On a five point scale (1 to 5 with one being no impact and five being high impact), they were to indicate their response. The responses indicated that the reform movement did have a slight impact; however, the impact was minimal in most respects. Table 13 indicates the average responses of the inquiry. The areas impacted to a noticeable degree include athletic programs, finances, and administration.

Table 12

Problems Identified

	Problem	Weighted score	f
1.	Financing/lack of support	195	83
2.	Student lack of interest/apathy	138	57
3.	Securing sponsors	80	41
4.	Lost academic time	61	33
5.	No appointed activity director	39	17
6.	Lack of facilities	25	12
7.	Student job interference	16	7
8.	Program effectiveness	15	8
9.	Lack of central office support	12	6
10.	Lack of leadership	10	4
11.	Eligibility loss due to drinking, drugs, or violations	9	4
12.	Parental interference	7	4
13.	Need for student leadership workshop	6	4
14.	Transportation problems	6	4
15.	Funding for sponsors' salaries	6	3
16.	Need for activity	6	2
17.	Scheduling activities	5	3
18.	Identifying compatible schools for competition	5	3

Table 13

Impact of Reform Movement on Specified Areas

Area	
Participation	1.86
Sponsorship	1.72
Administration	2.23
Finances	2.25
Athletic Programs	2.33
Student Government	1.73
Drill Team	1.62
Fine Arts	1.93
Publications	1.79
Clubs	1.71

Opinions of the Respondents

The respondents were asked if they personally supported a no pass/no play rule for student activities (including athletics). This question was asked to determine how those close to administering these programs felt concerning such a rule, realizing that they have a responsibility to both the academic pursuits of the students, their personal development, and a feel for the motivational support which the student activities program offers the academic program. The question was not answered by 42 percent of the respondents, giving somewhat of a neutral position in their non-response. Fifty-seven percent (101 responses) of the respondents supported the no pass/no play rule and only .6 percent (1 response) opposed the rule.

Respondents were asked with an open-ended question, in their opinion what changes would occur in student activities in the next ten years. The responses were classified and a frequency determined. Most often listed was less participation on the part of students. The following responses were given:

less participation as academic demands increase	30
increased costs and less funding	25
less participation due to job importance for students	21
outside sponsors being necessary as teachers don't want to be involved	13
more involvement in programs	11
students will continue to seek involvement	10
refinement of activities	7
better objectives for activities	7
released time for some activities	4
student quality would improve	3
local funding for essential needs of program	3
administrative recognition of connection of activities with better grades and attendance	3
difficulty in finding good coaches due to lack of funds	1
liability/risk problems will become apparent	1
elimination of football & replacement with soccer	1
decline in graduation requirement	1
changes will only occur if success levels are low	1
no changes will occur (specific statement)	4

Findings of the Study

Schools continue to offer a variety of activities for students to participate in, usually varying in number between ten and fifty. Generally, the larger the school the more diverse the activity offering which is available. Activities which are most frequently available include interscholastic athletics, choir/band/orchestra, cheerleading, honor society, student council, and drama/debate. Participation rates most often range between 25 to 50 percent of the students; however, about one-third of the schools indicated more than 50 percent of their students participate in activities.

Participation requirements usually focus on academic performance of the student with the most frequent requirement being a 2.0 grade point average. Other

performance options frequently indicated were passing all or four subjects. Few schools have a system to limit the amount of participation by students in activities. To increase minority/special population participation in activities a considerable number of schools had created special need clubs or associations such as Black Youth Association. Some schools had made an effort on the part of faculty or students to recruit or to interest specially identified populations in activities.

More than 75 percent of the schools had a statement of philosophy or objectives for the activities program in general, but only about half indicated that each activity had developed specific goals. About half of the schools had a committee which helped to provide direction for the program. The principal was the administrator responsible for the program in slightly less than half the cases and an activities director was responsible in approximately one-fourth of the cases. Faculty volunteers was the method by which most schools identified sponsors. More than 90 percent of the schools indicated they had a standardized method of remunerating sponsors; but less than one-quarter of the schools had any sponsor training conducted by the school. Less than one-third of the schools conducted a formal evaluation of their programs.

Activities were funded most often with appropriated funds, money raising projects, or admission fees. Booster clubs provided funds most often to athletics and music groups.

Problems most often identified as significant were financing the activities program, student lack of interest or apathy, securing sponsors, and lost academic time due to participation.

After five years into the school reform movement, the indication from the respondents was that the impact of the reform movement on activities was minimal--with the areas most affected being that of athletics, finances, and administration. Respondents felt that the future would bring less participation as academic demands increase, increased costs and difficulty in funding those expenses, and less participation due to increased student employment.

Conclusions

Student activities continue to play an important role in the secondary school program offered to students in the public schools. Schools and students do differ, however, in their implementation and participation in these programs. Despite the existence of identified standards and accepted practices in the implementation and administration of these programs, there is a wide diversity in the operation of the programs and in what is being offered.

Although the educational reform movement created a significant amount of controversy surrounding the student activities programs being offered, after five years the impact was considered minimal by those administering these programs and most often affected the athletic programs, the finance of the programs, and the administration of the program. Impact on participation, sponsorships, student government, drill teams, fine arts, publications and clubs was relatively small. The respondents themselves supported the no pass/no play rule for the most part or remained neutral on the question.

Problems which are most heavily impacting the student activities program are finances and lack of support, student lack of interest (or apathy) in the programs, securing sponsors for the activities, and a loss of academic study time for the students due to participation.

In looking at the future of the student activities program, the respondents felt that future participation would diminish due to academic demands and the importance of jobs for students, and that finances for student activities would become more difficult because of increased costs and less funding. The procuring of sponsors for activities will also become more difficult due to increased demands on teachers for a variety of reasons such as job pressures and the need for more income.

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